

# What freedom looks like in MIRA NAIR’S FILMS

Mira Nair’s women have always been unapologetically alive. They weep, desire, plot, and stumble with a self-awareness that makes them difficult to contain. Across her decades-long filmography, they have refused to be flattened into symbols of virtue or rebellion; they are flawed, defiant, tender, and human. In an industry often content to either idolise or invisibilise women, Nair carved a cinematic language that neither glorifies nor redeems them. She allows them to take up space, to be complicated, to have appetites.



Mira Nair’s women remind us that representation, at its best, is not about showing women who break every rule, but women who live despite them.

VISUAL:  
ANIKA TAHSEIN HAFSA

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

From her earliest works like *Salaam Bombay!* to *Monsoon Wedding* and *The Namesake*, Nair’s lens has remained steady in its gaze—curious but not judgmental, intimate but not invasive. She does not extract stories from her women, rather builds worlds around them. What distinguishes her filmmaking is not only the diversity of her female characters but the deliberate act of giving them narrative authority. They do not exist as extensions of men’s stories; men, if anything, often orbit around theirs. *Monsoon Wedding* is perhaps her most beloved and emblematic work. Set in Delhi amidst the

chaos of a Punjabi wedding, Nair constructs a world brimming with sensory overload and, within it, the emotional storms of women negotiating tradition, trauma, and autonomy. The ensemble cast allows multiple female perspectives to coexist without collapsing into cliché. Then there’s Ria, the protagonist’s cousin, whose narrative unravels one of Nair’s most courageous treatments of women’s pain—the revelation of childhood sexual abuse within the family. Nair frames Ria’s silence with mastery, letting her story emerge through stillness. When Ria finally speaks out, the camera does not sensationalise her trauma. In this cinematic restraint, Nair captures what

generations of South Asian women have been denied: the right to define their own pain without apology. This refusal to tidy up the complexities of womanhood runs through all her work. In *Mississippi Masala*, Demetrius and Mina’s interracial romance unfolds against the backdrop of displacement and prejudice, but Nair ensures that Mina’s choices remain central. She is neither fetishised nor tokenised; her relationship with Demetrius is portrayed not as rebellion for its own sake, but as a genuine, self-willed connection. For Nair, love is an act of agency, particularly for women taught that love must be earned through obedience. In *The Namesake*, based on Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel, Nair’s interpretation of Ashima is among her most tender portrayals. Ashima begins as a young Bengali woman uprooted into an alien American landscape, her life dissolving into the routines of immigration and motherhood. Yet Nair transforms what could have been a story of loss into one of gradual self-realisation. Ashima’s world is built around others, but through subtle gestures, Nair reveals her transformation. In one striking moment, Ashima, years after her husband’s death, decides to stay back in America rather than return to Kolkata. It is a mature act of self-possession; a recognition that home is not a place but a state of becoming. Few filmmakers capture aging

female subjectivity with such empathy and respect for quiet courage. What makes her representation of women radical is her understanding that liberation is rarely cinematic; it is domestic, gradual, negotiated. Her heroines do not always win; they survive. They do not topple systems; they navigate them. Stylistically, her filmmaking complements this ethos. She frames women as part of ecosystems, the camera lingers on female collectives: women laughing in kitchens, crying in bedrooms, sharing glances across crowded rooms. Her visual language rejects the male gaze by dissolving it; by allowing women to look, to be seen, and to look back. Across her films, Nair builds a counter-narrative to dominant tropes of South Asian womanhood. Her protagonists are rarely saints or martyrs; they are full-bodied, full-voiced women negotiating patriarchy, capitalism, and diaspora with wit and willpower. Even when they falter, they remain the narrators of their own stories. In this sense, Nair’s cinema is democratic. She allows her characters to be specific, textured, and fallible. In a time when global cinema often tokenises diversity through representation without context, Nair insists on complexity over visibility. Her women remind us that representation, at its best, is not about showing women who break every rule, but women who live despite them.



## Hoichoi to stream ‘Putul Nacher Itikotha’ from this November

After touring international festivals and releasing in Indian theatres on August 1, Suman Mukhopadhyay’s adaptation of Manik Bandyopadhyay’s classic *Putul Nacher Itikotha* is set to stream on Hoichoi from November 14. The film features Jaya Ahsan as Kusum alongside Abir Chatterjee and Parambrata Chatterjee, with the story reimaged in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Critics praised Jaya and Abir’s compelling on-screen chemistry during its theatrical run. Expressing her joy, Jaya said she hopes Bangladeshi audiences will embrace the film, as Manik Bandyopadhyay’s work “belongs to both sides of Bengal.” Meanwhile, her Bangladesh–Iran co-production *Fereshteh*, directed by Morteza Atashzamaz, premiered on Bongo on November 2 following its September 19 cinema release.

### WHAT’S THE HAPS?

## ‘Monkey Trial’

Batighar brings its gripping 26th staging of *Monkey Trial*, a sharp reimagining of the Scopescase, where a school teacher’s lesson on evolution ignites a moral battlefield. Sanjoy Sarker Muktonil’s direction transforms history into a fierce mirror, forcing audiences to confront the cost of fear, faith, and suppressed truth. **Date:** Monday | November 10, 2025 **Time:** 7:15pm onwards **Venue:** Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA



# NEWS

## Trinamool, BJP clash over West Bengal

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Meanwhile, the ECI has repeatedly assured that no eligible voter will be excluded if they can provide the required documents. Between October 31 and November 3, the BSF apprehended 89 people, stating them to be Bangladeshis staying illegally in India, for trying to illegally cross over to Bangladesh through West Bengal’s Basirhat border following the announcement of the SIR. The TMC has announced street agitations across the state and attacked both the BJP and the ECI on the SIR issue. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her nephew and the party’s second-in-command, Abhishek Banerjee, led the street march in Kolkata last week, accusing the BJP and ECI of turning the SIR into a political tool for a “silent, invisible rigging” ahead of the assembly polls. The TMC has been walking on thin ice. It does not want to give any impression of being a stumbling block in the preparation of an error-free voters’ list. At the same time, it warned against a single eligible voter being deleted from West Bengal’s rolls during the revision process. Abhishek Banerjee alleged the BJP and the ECI were “colluding to erase voters from opposition-ruled states” while sparing the ones governed by the saffron party. The TMC is visibly concerned about the potential exclusion of Muslim voters from the electoral roll. This voter segment has formed the party’s core support base since 2011 – just as it had been for the Left Front during its 34-year rule from 1977 to 2011. So it’s no wonder Mamata Banerjee has gone hammer and tongs on the SIR issue, accusing the BJP of “playing with fire” in the name of “purifying” the electoral roll and warning that any attempt to tamper with the voter list would amount to a “betrayal of democracy”. On the other hand, the BJP accused her of threatening violence over electoral roll revision. Ironically, it is Mamata, as Congress leader and later of the TMC, who had often accused the Left Front of manipulating voter lists by drafting in Bangladeshis by helping them secure Aadhar and ration cards. However, the TMC is now desperate to hold on to its Muslim vote base that

has shifted to it from the politically weakened Left. But concerns over SIR are not just of Muslim voters alone. The revision process has also caused worries among Hindu voters from West Bengal’s Matua community (the Nama-Shudra Hindus who migrated from what is now Bangladesh over decades) in the North 24 Parganas district bordering Bangladesh. Those not on the 2002 voter list must now furnish documents to prove eligibility. The Matuas are a decisive force in determining the electoral outcome in more than 40 assembly seats (out of the total of 294 seats in West Bengal) across the border districts of North 24 Parganas, Nadia, and parts of South 24 Parganas. Matua-majority areas include the Bongaon, Gaighata, Swarnnagar, Ashoknagar, and Krishnanagar assembly seats, where the BJP made deep inroads in 2019 and 2021. So it comes as no surprise that TMC and BJP are locked in a fierce battle to woo the support of the Matuas. India’s federal minister and Bongaon MP Shantanu Thakur, BJP’s most prominent Matua face, sought to reassure the community members, saying, “There is no need to worry if names of refugee Matuas are deleted. They will get Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act of December 2019.” However, the statement has failed to calm frayed nerves. Shantanu’s aunt and TMC Rajya Sabha lawmaker Mamata Bala Thakur, who leads a rival faction of the Matuas, fears that the names of many Matuas will be deleted from the voter roll, as they arrived after 2002 and do not have the necessary documents. There are concerns within the BJP too. The party’s legislator, Subrata Thakur, Shantanu’s brother, said those who arrived between 2002 and 2025 would not be able to produce the required papers. If they apply for Indian citizenship under the CAA, they can appeal to retain their names, though there is no guarantee, as the EC is an autonomous body. Subrata estimated that three to four million refugees across the state may qualify under the CAA, adding that the government is proceeding

cautiously to ensure “genuine victims of religious persecution (in Bangladesh) get citizenship, not infiltrators or Rohingyas misusing the process.” BJP’s Internal survey suggests 25–40 per cent of voters in assembly segments under Bongaon and Ranaghat Lok Sabha seats could be affected if Matuas fail to link their names to the 2002 rolls. In parts of Krishnanagar and Ranaghat, where Matua voters form nearly 60 per cent of the population, leaders have similar concerns. BJP has launched an outreach campaign, holding 1,000 CAA camps across border districts, North 24 Parganas, Nadia, Cooch Behar and Uttar Dinajpur. Party insiders point out that these four districts alone accounted for over half of the 77 assembly seats BJP won in 2021. HC halts Ctg port FROM PAGE 12 The CPA had increased port tariffs in September – the first such revision since the early 1980s – citing rising operational and maintenance costs, the need for modernisation, and currency depreciation. Under the new tariff schedule, charges for vessel berthing, container handling, storage, and other port services were raised across various categories. The revision, which took effect on October 15, drew sharp criticism from shipping operators, freight forwarders, and exporters, who warned that the sudden hike would raise logistics costs, squeeze profit margins, and reduce Bangladesh’s trade competitiveness, particularly in export-oriented sectors. Industry insiders said the higher port charges could make Bangladeshi exports less attractive in global markets and increase import costs for essential commodities, thereby impacting overall supply chain efficiency. Bangladesh Container Shipping Association and the BMLS subsequently filed separate writ petitions, arguing that the tariff changes were made without adequate stakeholder consultation and without lawful authority. Keywords: Chattogram Port, High Court, Ctg port tariff hike, port tariff hikeport charges, Bangladesh Maritime Law Society, CPA, Ministry of Shipping, writ petition, BCSEA

## Shortage of contraceptives

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Fourth Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) in June last year. In addition, expansion works at many hospitals, training programmes for health workers and salaries for health workers hired under the programme were halted after the interim government decided to scrap the proposed Fifth HPNSP last year. Like other ministries, the health ministry previously implemented its development activities through multiple separate projects. However, the large number of projects – many of which were funded by foreign donors – created significant coordination challenges. To address the issue, the projects were consolidated in 1998 into a five-year initiative called the First HPNSP. Projects of a similar nature were grouped under specific operational plans, such as primary healthcare, hospital management, disease control, maternal and child care, medical education and family planning. Over the past 27 years, the ministry has implemented four sector-wide programmes, with the Fourth HPNSP – comprising 29 operational plans – concluding in June last year. However, the interim government decided to move away from the

decade-old approach and planned to integrate the sectoral programme into the regular activities of health authorities to improve coordination and strengthen the basic health infrastructure of the country. It undertook a two-year exit plan with four short-term projects to address urgent issues such as manpower, medicines, preventive vaccines, emergency family planning services, equipment and maintenance, officials said. But it took around a year to finalise the projects, and during the time, the government made some block allocation to meet some emergency needs. One of the projects set to be placed today aims to implement the unfinished activities of essential family planning, maternal, child and reproductive health services under the completed Fourth HPNSP. The project, with a cost of Tk 1,664 crore, will run from July 2025 to June next year. Of the total allocation, Tk 947 crore will be spent on procuring contraceptives, Tk 193 crore on medicines and Tk 54 crore on equipment. The situation has improved following the earlier crisis in supply, said Ashrafi Ahmad, director general of the Directorate General of Family Planning, the implementing agency

of the project. There is sufficient stock to last until the middle of January, she said, adding that it usually takes around four months to complete the procurement process. “We, however, hope the supply will not be hampered once the project is approved,” she added. Another project aims to complete the unfinished tasks under five operational plans, involving Tk 1,546 crore, to be implemented between July this year and June 2026. The project seeks to complete pending works at 22 upazila-level hospitals and various offices of the health department, procure furniture for the facilities and carry out other related activities. The third project focuses on completing the unfinished tasks of the Fourth HPNSP, linked to the Directorate General of Medical Education, the Directorate General of Nursing and Midwifery and the National Institute of Population Research and Training. This project, with an estimated cost of Tk 212 crore and a deadline of June 2026, will primarily allocate funds for the training of medical professionals and health workers, procurement of medical equipment and other related activities.

## Theft rising amid lax security at HSIA cargo zone

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to walk out through the main gate with the stolen goods in plain sight, said the freight forwarder. He alleged that surveillance in this key area is extremely weak, and such incidents occur regularly. Many victims, he added, avoid filing complaints for fear of further trouble from the organised group operating there. With help from a BAFFA supervisor, he managed to recover six of the nine stolen items. Kabir Ahmed, immediate past president of BAFFA, admitted that thefts are frequent in the area. “Theft in such a secured zone should have been zero,” he said, adding that surveillance and monitoring must be improved. “We have raised the issue with the authorities many times, but little action has been taken to punish the criminals or enhance security,” he said. Faisal Samad, director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA),

echoed him. “The export cargo area is supposed to be highly secure, and incidents of theft should not happen there. But unfortunately, they do. Goods sometimes go missing from the import area too”. However, Boshra Islam, general manager (public relations) of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, denied the allegations, claiming the export cargo complex has proper security measures. “This area is completely under CCTV surveillance and monitored by security personnel round the clock. Therefore, there is no question of theft,” she quoted ABM Nazmul Huda, general manager (cargo) of Biman, as saying. She, however, said some parts of the export cargo village are controlled by the Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association, and incidents might occur there. Referring to the November 5 incident, she said Biman received a complaint but later found the theft had occurred in the area managed by BAFFA.

Asked about preventive measures, Boshra said, “The area under Biman’s control is fully monitored by CCTV and security personnel. If any incident occurs, we take action after analysing the CCTV footage.” A top official of Biman’s cargo section, requesting anonymity, said, “Unless you visit the area yourself, you won’t understand the real situation. The front area of the export cargo zone is controlled by the Freight Forwarders Association, which is responsible for its safety and security. What can Biman do if items are lost from their area? It’s not our concern if anything goes missing or is stolen from that zone.” The use of HSIA has been rising rapidly for air cargo export driven by export growth. The airport typically handles up to 1,000 tonnes of dry cargo daily, mostly garments, with volumes peaking between October and December. Exporters send nearly 2,500 tonnes of dry garment cargo a month through this route.